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DE RUEHMR #0520/01 0801235
ZNY CCCCC ZZB
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FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2126
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0157
RUEHLA/AMCONSUL BARCELONA PRIORITY 2546
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 000520

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2017

TAGS: PREL SP

SUBJECT: SPAIN/IRAQ: SOCIALISTS FIRE UP ANTI-WAR RHETORIC
FOR ELECTORAL SEASON

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Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens; reason 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a volatile political climate leading up to regional/municipal elections in late May, the ruling Socialist Party (PSOE) and issue. The Madrid Regional PSOE joined the far left "United Left" (IU), unions, and pacifist groups staged mass demonstrations against the war war in Iraq, to include possible charges against former President Aznar, PM Blair, and President Bush (Spaniards frequently refer to the "Picture of the Azores" in 2003 of the three leaders as the moment in which the decision to go to war was made, thus linking Aznar not just with the Spanish troop deployment, but with full responsibility for the war). PSOE Secretary Jose Blanco said in a March 20 television interview that "someone must pay" for the war in Iraq, and that if someone could demonstrate criminal culpability on the part of political leaders, Blanco said he was "all for it." The Ambassador contacted National Security Adviser Carles Casajuana on March 21 to convey his deep concern regarding the direction and tenor of PSOE statements on Iraq, which could only harm bilateral relations. Casajuana discussed the heated political context of the statements and said he expected them to abate soon, but assured the Ambassador that he would convey the Ambassador's concerns to President Zapatero immediately. The DCM is following up with PSOE Secretary Blanco to insist that the PSOE avoid dragging the

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USG into its domestic conflict with the PP. End summary.

//HEATED POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT//

¶2. (C) In the runup to May 27 regional and municipal elections, the political environment in Spain has become increasingly aggressive. The PP has not gained in most opinion polls, but its criticism of President Zapatero's controversial policies in the Basque Region has steadily eroded electoral support for the PSOE. In a show of strength, the PP led an anti-ETA, anti-Zapatero demonstration on March 10 in Madrid that drew at least 1 million people. The PSOE stormed back the following week, refocusing public attention on former President Aznar's unpopular decision to commit Spanish forces to the war in Iraq. The Madrid Region PSOE, joined by the PSOE Secretary for International Relations Elena Valenciano, organized a smaller mass rally on March 17 against the Iraq war and against the U.S. detention of enemy combatants at Guantanamo.

¶3. (U) The PSOE Parliamentary group joined the fray on March 20, negotiating a non-binding resolution with the far left IU that sharply criticized the "illegal" war in Iraq. The resolution passed with the Ghraib, Guantanamo, and the execution of Saddam Hussein." (NOTE: The PSOE version of the resolution removed IU language calling on the USG to h

//GARZON, PSOE LEADER WEIGH IN//

¶4. (U) Judge Garzon published an editorial in the leading daily "El Pais" on March 20 that lambasted Aznar for declining to "heed UN inspector responsibility" should be assigned to Aznar, Prime Minister Blair, and President Bush. Spaniards frequently refer to the "Picture of the Azores" whether Aznar should be prosecuted for having involved Spain

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in the war in Iraq. Blanco said that "someone must respond in the face of this horror, and if there are reasons and grounds from the legal point of view, then we must do so."

//AMBASSADOR CALLS PRESIDENTIAL ADVISER//

¶5. (C) The Ambassador contacted National Security Adviser Carles Casajuana on March 21 to express his concern regarding the increasingly shrill political context, but that he was running out of patience with unfair Government and PSOE statements regarding the U.S.

¶6. (C) Casajuana said that the political environment was "highly polarized" at the moment and blamed the PP for having stirred the pot on the issue. Casajuana said he understood that the "spillover" of the debate had impacted USG sensitivities, but said he expected the Iraq issue to run its political campaign continued.

¶7. (C) The DCM will follow up with a similar message to other officials and has requested meetings with PSOE Secretary Blanco and PSOE Internal Affairs Minister Aguirre